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ABSTRACT

This document describes a program called Community Conversations, a joint effort between Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society of the two-year college, and the Community College Humanities Association. The program consisted of a series of national and regional conversations among students and community members, addressing what it means to be an American. Highlights of the conversations, which took place at two-year institutions in Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oregon, North and South Carolina, Texas, and Washington, include: (1) one theme that emerged repeatedly was the keen interaction and interplay between national issues and local issues; (2) participants defined themselves and their communities by a sense of place, yet noted the difficulties of overcoming isolation; (3) the continuing tragedy of racism provoked strong reactions from African Americans, and questions of racial difference and treatment occasionally brought conversations to a halt; (4) the conversations augmented people's sense of community and clarified their understanding of questions of American identity. Each conversation is described in detail. This paper also presents guidelines for conversation leaders--step-by-step suggestions on how to plan and organize these types of conversations. Appended is information on the community conversation leaders, Phi Theta Kappa, and the Community College Humanities Association. (JA)

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COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

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COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Toward Shared Understandings of American Identity

A National Conversation
on American Pluralism and Identity Project

conducted by

Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society
and the
Community College Humanities Association

By:
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This publication was developed with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

by David A. Berry, Emma Jo Marshall and Diane U. Eisenberg

In 1994, Sheldon Hackney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, initiated a flagship program, the National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity, that aimed to reinvigorate civil discourse about what it means to be an American. What divides us? What do we have in common? What holds us together?

The National Conversation is an opportunity for Americans to explore the diversity of race, ethnicity, and culture that enriches our country and the values that we share as Americans. The conversation consists of thousands of small-group discussions across the country conducted by Americans from many backgrounds who come together for frank and open exchanges about our differences as well as our common ground. It builds on the experience and knowledge of the people involved. It stresses cooperation and participation. It affirms that public discussion of public issues is important.

When the National Conversation program was announced, Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges, and the Community College Humanities Association, the national education association that works to strengthen the humanities at the nation's two-year colleges, collaborated to submit a proposal to the Endowment. The proposal entitled *Community Conversations: Toward Shared Understandings of American Identity* was funded. It enabled the two organizations to conduct a series of national, regional, and local conversations for students and community members. The conversations addressed one of today's most perplexing issues ... how might the people of this country reach shared understandings, by talking together, about what it means to be an American.

A model for the conversations was presented to twenty two-member teams of college faculty members by co-project directors Jo Marshall and David Berry at the Phi Theta Kappa International Convention in Chicago, April 6, 1995. Each team was composed of a Phi Theta Kappa regional coordinator who had been certified to teach the *Phi Theta Kappa Leadership Development Studies* course, and a humanities faculty scholar who was a member of the Community College Humanities Association.

At the Chicago convention, Jo Marshall, representing Phi Theta Kappa, opened the project's first session by presenting the conversation's ground rules to the assembled participants. David Berry, representing the Community College Humanities Association, then introduced the theme of American identity, setting it in an historical context by describing successive waves of American immigration. He led the group through a lively conversation as participants reacted to a set of provocative "conversation starters," engaging excerpts from key documents and texts in American history and literature.

The conversation addressed "What does it mean to be an American?" It followed the pattern that many succeeding conversations would replicate in regional and local settings over the project's tenure. The idea was to begin by considering major themes of identity in American history, literature, and culture, then apply these themes at the community level, and finally to move to individual reflections about personal experiences and feelings of identity. This sequence mirrored the project's central questions:

- How have American history, literature and culture contributed to our understanding of ourselves and our communities?
- Are there distinctive characteristics or qualities of our communities that contribute to our identity as Americans?
- How do my life story and the history of my community contribute to my concept of American identity?

Following this opening conversation at the Phi Theta Kappa International Convention, the twenty teams of conversation leaders began their preparations for three regional and local conversations at each of their colleges and regional locations. Over the course of the eighteen-month project, a total of fifty-four local and regional conversations were held. In addition, six national conversations took place at meetings of the Community College Humanities Association and Phi Theta Kappa.

An important key to the success of these many conversations was the involvement of an array of community groups who brought with them a broad range of perspectives on the topics addressed. The conversations were convened at community colleges in collaboration with local civic associations such as:

- La Raza, a Hispanic civil rights organization
- AIM, American Indian Movement, Littleton, Colorado
- NAACP Minority Economics Development Council, Ocala, Florida
- Jewish Community Center, Flint, Michigan
- Swedish Heritage Club, Cambridge, Minnesota
- Sons of Italy, Delhi, New York
- Parent-Teacher Association, Warner, Oklahoma
- Filipino Nurses Association, Charleston, South Carolina
- Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs

The number of participants attending the project's community conversations ranged from five to seventy-five, although most conversation leaders felt that twenty-five persons was the optimum size for a quality conversation that gave most participants the opportunity to speak. One conversation was conducted on the Internet and attracted 345 "hits" over a three-week time frame.

The stories included in this report provide a representative portrait of the *Community Conversations* project. A theme that emerges repeatedly is the keen interaction and interplay between national issues and local issues. Major questions and concepts of American identity are played out locally—in effect, local issues matter! Participants often defined themselves and their communities by a sense of place, whether it is the young man from Oklahoma who spoke of his pride in being a cowboy and connected his identity to the heritage of the American West or the young Vietnamese immigrant who consciously reconnected her life to her new-found community in a northern city in California. At the same time, others noted the difficulties of overcoming isolation—of neighbors who do not know their neighbors, and families who do not eat dinner together or engage each other in conversation. The continuing tragedy of American racism provoked strong reactions from African Americans, and questions of racial difference and treatment on occasion brought conversations to a halt.

Yet in the end, the conversations augmented people's sense of community and clarified their understanding of questions of American identity. The conversation leaders remarked that people left the sessions better informed and more aware of their responsibilities as part of a community of diverse and well-meaning people who, through discussion, can grapple with important ideas. Participants seemed to realize the value of the process itself. As one historian put it, "What came through to me was the value of the dialogue itself—exploring our differences, appreciating those differences, and yet in the very act of conversation, demonstrating the things that bind us together."

The most remarkable characteristics of the conversations have been the eagerness, indeed the hunger, of students and community participants to be a part of the conversations, and the willingness to engage substantive issues of American pluralism and identity. The NEH National Conversation initiative has tapped an important need of Americans. It is this need that has led many teams to devise ways to continue the *Community Conversations* on their campuses. Some faculty have incorporated *Community Conversations* into their courses in American history and literature; others have scheduled regular meetings for faculty and students. One campus group decided to make the conversation on American identity a part of their freshman orientation program.

Community colleges and their community-based partners are the ideal participants for the NEH National Conversations. The nation's 1,200 community colleges, with their "building community mission" and their tradition of serving as "public spaces" to which citizens come to discuss critical issues, reach more than ten million students. The community college student body mirrors its community population. Whether they are urban, suburban, or rural institutions, or whether they serve a preponderance of traditional transfer students or adult life-long learners, community colleges exist to serve the educational needs of their communities.

The intent of this monograph is to capture and describe the process and quality of the conversations conducted by conversation leaders at participating community colleges. Its purpose is to provide all other community colleges with tools and inspiration to initiate *Community Conversations* in their locales. As a first step, these colleges should enlist a Phi Theta Kappa faculty advisor and a CCHA humanities faculty member. With this monograph as their resource, a new *Community Conversations* project will be born.

We want to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for its support of this project. An aside—it saddens us to think that at a time when our project was so successfully engaging thousands of student and community participants in meaningful discussions about American pluralism and identity, the 104th U.S. Congress was attacking and drastically cutting the budget of the modest federal agency that was responsible for so much needed civic participation and reflection. We can only hope that the new Congress will restore the NEH budget to its prior level of funding, and, as its educational and scholarly functions are fully appreciated, raise that level even higher.

We thank the faculty members who participated in this project. In addition to their heavy teaching and professional workloads, they accepted the further responsibilities of *Community Conversations*. We recognize and appreciate the important role our staff played in bringing this project to fruition: Barbara Shapiro, for her exemplary writing and editorial skills; Joeanne Logan, Community College Humanities Association; Debra Levin, Cindy Crandall, and Conal Groom, Phi Theta Kappa and Eisenberg Associates; and Jacqueline Grant, Chattahoochee Valley Community College.

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PART II

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS...

The pages that follow contain summaries of selected reports submitted by the leaders of Community Conversations held throughout 1995 and 1996 in Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oregon, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and the state of Washington. The reports describe how the conversations were organized, how they were conducted, and what was said about our shared values and identity as Americans.

Community Conversations in Colorado

Three community conversations were conducted in Colorado—two at Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado Springs, and one at Phi Theta Kappa's Colorado Region convention in Westminster. The conversations were led by Clark Alexander, professor of psychology, Arapahoe Community College, and Sandra Cheowa-Mokine, speech instructor, Pikes Peak Community College, representing Phi Theta Kappa, and Richard Trussell, professor of philosophy, Pikes Peak Community College, representing the Community College Humanities Association.

Westminster's Conversation

Sixty people, representing a range of ethnicities, ages, and income levels, met for their conversation at a recreation center in Westminster. Clark Alexander introduced the conversation's ground rules, explained the format, and introduced Richard Trussell, who offered two conversation starters. The first was the following quotation from Sheldon Hackney, Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities:

> "All of our people have a responsibility to examine and discuss what unites us as a country, what we share as common American values in a nation comprised of many divergent groups and beliefs. For too long we have let what divides us capture the headlines and sound bites, polarizing us rather than bringing us together."

As a second conversation starter, Trussell suggested:

> "...as a metaphor for the United States we consider a rock-solid wall or foundation for the hopes of millions—hewn from many and varied stones of different colors, sizes, and shapes—held together by the strong cement of the values and ideas that bind us together as Americans."

Following a brief period of open discussion, participants were divided into smaller groups and given the task of identifying values they share as Americans. After thirty minutes, the whole group reconvened and spokespersons for the small groups summarized their individual discussions.

What Was Said?

The values upon which there was most agreement or "common ground" included the importance of education, religious freedom, freedom to hold and express any idea, and the opportunity to improve one's material life. A second tier of values presented by several groups included the desire for security, the importance of family, community participation, equal oppor-

tunities for all, real justice, respect and tolerance for others, and patriotism. The closest the group came to a disagreement was one small group's insistence that "not all Americans would share the values identified." According to the conversation leader, the most worthwhile outcome was that all the groups decided they could, indeed, identify common values, despite their initial skepticism.

Colorado Springs' Conversations

The two community conversations conducted at Pikes Peak Community College were well attended, each drawing approximately forty participants from a variety of races, religions, and cultures. The first conversation began with quotations from W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King, Jr., followed by a five-member multi-racial panel of members of the Colorado Springs community—a school teacher, a pastor, a librarian, a psychologist, and a former gang member. After each spoke from personal experience about what it means to be an American, the conversation was opened to all participants. The second conversation occurred the following day. Richard Trussell divided participants into small groups to share their responses to the questions "What is the American dream? Are you a part of it?" A spokesperson for each group then shared the responses with all participants.

What Was Said?

Participants in the first community conversation agreed that we must understand ourselves if we are to understand others. There was agreement that values held in common are freedom, power, opportunity, and individualism. Two concerns that separate us are fear and lack of education. A comment that remained with the conversation leader came from a faculty member: "We should look beyond our differences and remember we are all one race...the human race!"

At the second community conversation, shared values included financial stability, the opportunity to provide for one's family, personal freedom, power, and a safe, moral environment. Participants added the caveat that the reality of achieving these values is stymied by "the societal corruption one lives with on a daily basis." Several participants disagreed about whether greed and power have places in the American dream. Others questioned whether the quality of "self-centeredness" is a uniquely American trait. If so, does it create separatism? One participant said he wishes the American dream "was still marriage, a family, and a house with a white picket fence...life was so simple when the dream consisted of basic things; my parents' divorce shattered my dream." Another participant stated that her dream was "to be able to provide for my children and raise them with the best spiritual and moral grounding that anyone could give." According to the conversation leader, the most worthwhile aspect of the conversation was the degree of openness with which participants shared their stories.

Community Conversations in Indiana

Three community conversations were conducted in Indiana—one at the Indiana Phi Theta Kappa Fall Leadership Conference held on the campus of Indiana University/Purdue University at Fort Wayne; one at Ivy Tech State College in Indianapolis; and one at Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis. The conversations were led by Eugene Spiess, professor of computer information services, at Ivy Tech State College, who represented Phi Theta Kappa, and Christopher Wood, Division Chair of General Education, representing the Community College Humanities Association.

Fort Wayne's Conversation

Forty-seven students and faculty members from twenty different college campuses in Indiana and Ohio representing ethnic groups ranging from African and Native American to European attended the community conversation in Fort Wayne. The conversation process, which was replicated at the other two Indiana sites, closely followed the format described in *Guidelines for Conversation Leaders.* Participants introduced themselves, a time-consuming activity, but one that leaders felt stimulated considerable dialogue and interaction later in the conversation. All three conversations began with a Henry Cabot Lodge quotation advocating the elimination of such "hyphenated-American" terms as Irish-American or African-American. This provocative opener always elicited a strong reaction; the conversation leader's first priority was to permit as many participants as possible to be heard. Ten minutes before the conversation's conclusion, a pre-select-ed recorder delivered a summation report entitled "This Is What I Heard."

What Was Said?

The importance of individual rights was a major theme in this conversation. Many participants emphasized the importance of teaching the younger generation to treat others as individuals rather than as representatives of a group; both racial and gender stereotypes were examined. Many felt that stereotyping is so ingrained in the American consciousness that significant progress will not be made until today's children have become adults. There was a strong belief in the idea that to eliminate the need for "hyphenated-Americans," the United States must first eliminate prejudice and realize that diversity is one of the country's greatest attributes. A concluding comment to the discussion was that many citizens have such mixed and diverse ethnic backgrounds that they can only see themselves as Americans.

The recorder for the session appended a comment to her notes that deserves to be heard:

"I am not a U.S. citizen, but I have to say that I was very disappointed that no individuals mentioned the privileges they enjoy as Americans. There isn't another country on this planet that has as many fringe benefits as this one does. Perhaps it's precisely because I am an immigrant that I appreciate the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the right to worship as I choose, the right and resources to pursue my academic goals, the right, in fact, to be educated at all! ... Perhaps people have to live without these things in order to appreciate their value."

Ivy Tech State College's Conversations

A community conversation was held on the campus of Ivy Tech State College as a faculty in-service program for forty full-time faculty members. It followed the same format and process as the previously described conversation.

What Was Said?

This conversation focused on what it means to be an American and whether we can identify a "common ground." The group was determined to explore commonalities, although some participants grew uncomfortable when issues of diversity or ethnicity were introduced. Most agreed, however, that the concept of the melting pot has never been realized. Many participants expressed remorse and shame for the treatment of Native Americans and hoped that efforts could be made to improve their situation. Some felt that the ill treatment of both Native Americans and African-Americans in the past should be rectified by members of the present generation; others felt the current generation has not inherited any responsibilities for the wrongs of their ancestors. One speaker was thankful for the toleration of differences in the United States; she noted that the mainstream culture is very accepting of the pacifist sect in which she was raised. Another speaker expressed discomfort by her disclosure; he felt that her background, and the backgrounds of all the other participants, should remain private and that her discussion of diversity was essentially fruitless. By the discussion's end, most participants felt they could talk about diversity, although few actually did.

The group was more comfortable discussing commonalities. They agreed that family, church, community, and military service were factors that made them feel that they "belonged" to America. Most also agreed that a shared language increases the feeling of commonality and that English should be the only official language of the country.

Arsenal Technical High School's Conversation

Forty-five students from two high school classes and five students from Ivy Tech State College participated in a community conversation in the media center of Arsenal Technical High School. The conversation was part of a high school course entitled "Topics in History."

What Was Said?

The final conversation addressed the importance of ethnicity in American culture. Some participants disliked the idea of ethnic labeling and felt that ethnic origins need to be de-emphasized. One participant pointed out that all too often ethnic identification leads to stereotyping. Others felt that undue importance is placed on accepting and conforming to the language and culture of the mainstream; respect for ethnicity and individuality should be increased. Many of the high school students lamented that the feeling of neighborhood solidarity described by their parents—which was often based on ethnic commonality—has become a thing of the past. It has been replaced by a lack of trust and a fear of violence.

The conversation intensified among the high school students when they began to discuss the social strata peculiar to their high school. Most believed that their social categories—"nerds," "skaters," "preps"—create stronger bonds than does ethnic background. Their understanding of group identity and of their fellow students seemed to deepen as they explored the topic from this point of view.

Community Conversations in Michigan

Michigan's three conversations took place at Mott Community College in Flint; on the campus of Henry Ford Community College, in Dearborn; and at the Thomas Edison Hotel in Port Huron, as part of the Michigan region of Phi Theta Kappa annual convention. Each of the conversations was attended by more than one hundred people. All were led by Richard Bailey, Henry Ford Community College, representing the Community College Humanities Association, and Gail Knapp, Mott Community College, representing Phi Theta Kappa. To accomplish their goal of attracting as diverse a group of people as possible, the team leaders sought help from a broad range of community organizations.

All three conversations were conducted in a similar manner. They opened with a general introduction and review of the conversation rules, followed by a selected reading (a different piece for each conversation) to serve as a conversation starter. Then the large group was divided into small groups; to ensure that friends not "stick together," the leaders used a "counting-off" system. After forty-five minutes of individual group discussion, the large group was convened. Small groups reported on their conversations and a large group conversation followed, during which individuals commented on both their own impressions of the topics and their experiences in the small groups.

Flint's Conversation

Approximately one hundred and eighty people attended this conversation at Mott Community College, which received newspaper coverage before and after the event. Students from both Mott Community College and Mott Middle College High School attended, along with community leaders from the Urban League, the Spanish Speaking Information Center, the Human Relations Council, and the Genesee Valley Indian Association. Also in attendance were people from the area who had heard about the conversation through the newspaper coverage. The local television station covered the event and showed it on the evening news.

Dearborn's Conversation

Invitations were extended to presidents of local educational institutions as well as to the Dearborn City Council, churches, mosques, synagogues, and civic organizations. Each group was asked to send two representatives; more than one hundred people attended.

Fort Huron's Conversation

This conversation, consisting of approximately one hundred and seventy-five people, all of whom were either community college faculty, administrators, or honor students, was more homogeneous than the other two. Nevertheless, there was great ethnic diversity, including African, Arab, and a broad range of European ancestry.

What Was Said?

Although the conversations took place at three different times, a theme that permeated all the sessions was the recognition that being American means valuing diversity. Many participants mentioned that there is no other place in the world where so many different cultures come together and expect to be appreciated for who they are. There was general agreement that this is an ideal that is not always realized, but that our national strength comes from our continuing belief that this ideal is worth the struggle.

Participants also agreed that America is not a melting pot. Indeed, there was almost complete agreement that the melting pot had never happened and that it is a good thing that it had not. Each ingredient has its own unique personality and distinct entity, but together they are more than the sum of the parts. Participants suggested that better metaphors than "melting pot" are "mosaic," "salad bowl," and "stew." A high school student observed that "all of the ingredients in the stew are improved in flavor by the presence of the others."

Some black participants expressed anger and frustration at being misunderstood and feeling alienated. One black man described seeing women clutch their handbags when he passes them on the street. A black student explained how different the country seemed to him after serving in the military. He had never left his all-black community before, and had a very distorted view of whites. He emphasized that we need to know each other if we are ever to get beyond the stereotypes we all have of one another.

Some of the most positive and patriotic feelings about the United States were expressed by immigrants, who explained how happy they are to be Americans. One naturalized citizen wanted everyone to realize that "in spite of all our problems we have more freedom and opportunity here than anywhere else in the world."

Participants in all three conversations expressed amazement when the two hours were over, and most wanted to continue. In each case plans are afoot to hold more conversations. According to the conversations' leaders, "The act of speaking and listening, of expressing care about what binds us together and what causes we confront is profoundly moving."

Here is how they concluded their report:

> "For the two of us who facilitated the process, these conversations surpassed our expectations. We knew that people would talk to each other and that that would result in greater understanding. But we didn't know how hungry we all are to have this experience. We never expected attendance to be so great, the participants to be to eager, or the rules so easy to enforce. We are convinced that most people want to live in an America that is multicultural and that we are eager to hear and learn about what our neighbors think."

Community Conversations in Mississippi

Three conversations were held in Mississippi. The first, at the Waveland Resort Inn on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, was part of the program of the Mississippi-Louisiana regional Phi Theta Kappa convention. The second and third conversations were convened at Pearl River Community College. Norma Hammill, an instructor at Pearl River Community College, Poplarville, Mississippi, and regional coordinator of the Mississippi-Louisiana region of Phi Theta Kappa, acted as host of the first two and leader of the third. The first two conversations were led by Max Reichard, Community College Humanities Association faculty scholar from Delgado Community College, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Bay Saint Louis's Conversation

Approximately sixty students and ten to fifteen faculty advisors attended the conversation. Participants were primarily young white students and older adults, with a sprinkling of African American and foreign students. Dr. Reichard used the preamble to the Declaration of Independence as a conversation starter and then led a panel of students in a discussion of the question What does it mean to be an American? Prior to the conversation, Phi Theta Kappa members had participated in a skit competition based on the honors study topic "Rights, Privileges and Responsibilities: An Indelicate Balance." The focus of the skit was diversity and tolerance in America; this activity served as an excellent progression into the conversation.

What Was Said?

The emphasis of the conversation was on the meaning of freedom in American culture. Dr. Reichard opened on a personal note by relating what it means to him as a naturalized citizen to be an American. His recounting of the experience of coming to America at the age of ten provided an excellent context for audience participation. In fact, the conversation had to be cut short because of the rigid schedule of the convention. As one student said, "It was very good. As different as opinions were, it was a good way of bringing people together—whether you agreed or disagreed, you can respect one another." Another student added that for rural Mississippi community college students, this was a way of "opening minds to different ideas."

Poplarville's First Conversation

Despite considerable planning and publicity, this conversation convened with a less diverse group than had been hoped. Nevertheless, a microbiology class in attendance provided a mixture of young white males and

females, some older adults, and two African-American females. The conversation starters were quotations by Joan Didion, Sojourner Truth, and Henry Cabot Lodge. The conversation focused on a discussion of three questions: What is the role of the humanities in understanding ourselves and our communities? What do we mean by "community" in American history? How do my life story and the history of my community contribute to my conception of American identity?

What Was Said?

Participants grappled with the meaning of *e pluribus unum*—pluralism and identity in American culture. The conversation elicited one student's criticism of the emphasis on individualism at all cost, no matter how destructive for the rest of society. An African American student described the significance of the church in her life and in that of many other African Americans. The church, she explained, provides the "sense of community" and for her is an essential component of what it means to be an American.

The conversation leader reported that the conversation was well focused and all members of the group actively participated in the discussion. He observed that although he and the faculty tended to emphasize common heritage, values, and political system, the students focused on their concerns about the divisions in American culture. Nevertheless, the students noted the value of the dialogue: exploring our differences, appreciating those differences, and yet in the very act of conversation demonstrating the things that bind us together.

Poplarville's Second Conversation

This conversation was attended by ten students; Miller Hammill, dean of student affairs; Ann Morris, a Phi Theta Kappa advisor; and Norma Hammill as leader. She began the conversation by asking participants to introduce themselves and tell something about their ethnic background. Even within what had appeared to be homogeneous grouping, the ethnic diversity turned out to be extremely broad. After she introduced participants to the ground rules, the leader began the discussion by asking the group what being an American means to them.

What Was Said?

The group reached consensus on the meaning of being an American—"freedom to do what you wanted." From this concept of freedom came some concern that in certain areas of our society, freedom has gone too far. Discussion then led to concerns regarding moral breakdown, turmoil within families, and crime in America. When the conversation arrived at how each participant can make a difference in correcting the wrongs within

our country, members of the group suggested encouraging people to consider such professions as teaching, the health professions, or social work. They challenged each other to become more actively involved in volunteer activities. The conversation leader came away convinced that although the group was small in number, the conversation stimulated participants to think about their roles as American citizens and the ways in which they can make a difference. In addition, students had the opportunity to better understand administrators and faculty and, in turn, administrators and faculty were encouraged by the commitment of the students. The leader's conclusions are as follows:

> "The strength of the conversation was the active involvement and participation of the participants. If a conversation were held in the future, an attempt would be made to stage it during a scheduled meeting of the Afro-American Society. I learned from participation in the project that only a very small percentage of the population is willing to give of their time in a discussion of what it means to be an American. In my opinion, the one thing Americans hold in common is freedom. However, the greatest challenge facing Americans is their failure to accept the fact that freedom requires responsibility."

Community Conversations in Missouri

Three conversations were held in Missouri—at the Forest Park campus of St. Louis Community College, at the Meramec campus of the college, and at the Springfield, Missouri site of the annual state Phi Theta Kappa conference. All three conversations were organized and conducted by John Bayer, professor of English, a Phi Theta Kappa advisor for many years and currently the director of the Meramec campus honors program; and Richard Kalfus, the faculty/scholar team member, who is chair of the humanities department on the Meramec campus. The conversations addressed the topic "Affirmative Action and the St. Louis Community." Among the clubs who participated in the conversations were the African American Student Organization, the International Club, the Economics Club, the Student Government, and the Young Democrats. Invitations were extended to the human resource directors of ten major companies in the St. Louis area. Five of the ten companies sent several representatives to the conversations; two companies sent *the* employee responsible for overseeing the company's compliance with government affirmative action guidelines. Also attending were social workers employed in government agencies that assist minorities in finding employment.

The conversations were formally structured and opened with the Martin Luther King, Jr. quotation, the Civil Rights Act section, a statement by Daniel J. Boorstin, and the proposed California amendment banning affirmative action. They included a ten-minute video excerpt of an interview with the two California professors spearheading the drive for passage of the amendment. Approximately sixty to seventy-five minutes was devoted to open discussion among participants.

Forest Park's Conversation

Approximately forty-five participants engaged in conversation at this city campus of the college. Given the nature of the topic, it was appropriate that the first conversation should take place at Forest Park, where a majority of the student body is African American and where the largest number of foreign students is enrolled.

Meramec's Conversation

This suburban campus is predominately white and middle-class; daily contact with minority students is somewhat limited. Twenty participants engaged in the conversation here.

Springfield's Conversation

The Phi Theta Kappa audience was quite homogeneous, as opposed to those at the college campuses, where organizers searched for a mix of students, faculty, community activists, business men and women, social agency professionals, and religious leaders. Thirty-five people participated in the conversation at the conference.

What Was Said?

If one were to single out one aspect of the conversations which was most valuable in helping everyone gain insight into American pluralism and identity, it would be the testimonies of many participants on their very personal, usually painful encounters with racial discrimination. According to the conversation leaders,

> "These personal testimonies were important for us all to hear; they confirmed that conversations on racially sensitive issues need to be conducted in our society—a society which has by no means brought the American ideal of equality to all its citizens. At first glance, this may appear to be a very disheartening outcome of our conversations. Yet, the very recognition that a real problem exists is a necessary first step toward setting the stage for meaningful change in the future. All three groups of participants came to the realization during their conversations that it was all too easy for most non-minorities to pay lip-service to racial/ethnic equality."

The conversations made it clear that stereotypical assumptions on affirmative action should be avoided. A Mexican American Phi Theta Kappa student was furious with the supporters of affirmative action. He did not want to be labeled "an affirmative action success story." This view was also held by an African American businessman who wanted the audience to know that his managerial position, and those of many other African Americans employed in supervisory positions in large companies, was the result of talent and tenacity and *not* affirmative action.

Concluded one of the conversation leaders,

> "In observing the interaction of the participants whose age, educational experience, and socio-economic backgrounds were very different, I was struck by the realization that here *active* learning was taking place, something which doesn't happen enough in the traditional classroom setting.... In our discussions people from various disciplines with diverse expertise and personal histories had come together to learn together from one another by sharing and listening. This was education at its best!"

Community Conversations in New York

Four conversations took place in New York. The first was held on the campus of Delhi College of Technology, Delhi, with ten people attending. The second, at the New York Region Phi Theta Kappa Honors Institute at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, had fifty attendees. The third, at the Phi Theta Kappa regional convention in Rochester, had twenty participants. The final conversation occurred in Oneonta on the campus of Hartwick College with six participants. All four conversations were led by Ann Sova, professor of English at Broome Community College in Binghamton; and Rosalie Higgins, professor of hospitality management at the SUNY College of Technology in Delhi. Both leaders are chapter advisors for Phi Theta Kappa.

To publicize the conversations, organizers made contact with such community associations as the NAACP, Rotary Clubs, the Sons of Italy, and the Knights of Columbus. Local aldermen, mayors, town supervisors, college council members, and other community leaders and officials received individual letters of invitation. In addition, news releases appeared in two local newspapers announcing the conversations and inviting the public to attend.

To open the conversations, participants were invited to share information about themselves that they felt was pertinent to the group and its endeavor. After a presentation and discussion of the ground rules, conversation leaders asked participants to discuss what is meant by civil discourse and why it is difficult to conduct civil discourse in our society. At appropriate times during the course of each conversation the leaders introduced conversation starters, among them quotations from Simone Weil and Martin Luther King.

What Was Said?

When asked the question "What values define Americans today?," participants responded that equality, or a lack of prejudice, is still a value we hold dear as Americans; many other countries still look to us as a model. Our devotion to our form of government, our sense of responsibility, our continued pursuit of the American Dream, our persistence to achieve—all these are seen as definitions of what we are as Americans; these values are envied by others. Do participants believe that there is some skepticism about achieving the American Dream today? There was some sense that our government has confined us with so many rules that we are losing some of our freedom and liberty. There was much discussion focusing on frustration about our government. Yet, participants acknowledged that we chose our government. How do we reconcile these two realities?

When asked whether we continue to share common values, most felt that many of our traditional values are intact—that especially in times of disaster or adversity, our common values become stronger. Our generosity toward each other shines during those times.

Participants discussed the need for roots and their own affiliations. Some affiliations, such as gangs, are negative, but they fulfill a need to belong or to be needed. Do our affiliations conflict with each other? The public person and the private person are sometimes in conflict.

As a metaphor for America, the concept of Americans as a necklace—"a common thread weaving through each part to hold it together, but each piece being different and lending its own beauty as an individual," appealed to most of the group. There was consensus that mutual respect is a goal we all strive for. But if we want respect, we must give respect. The group agreed that respect first comes from within.

In response to the concept of the melting pot, the group felt there is still some segregation in America, especially economic segregation. A young Jamaican male interjected that Americans are "great pretenders." He said, "We all act like we accept each other, but we are really pretending." His assertion prompted considerable discussion. On this point the group concluded that while this hypocrisy has perhaps been the case in the past, we are becoming less guilty of pretending, and that since the 1950s we have improved. We are more honest about our feelings toward each other and can accept our differences.

Why do we focus so much on ethnicity? Why do we label ourselves? Are we not all Americans? The ideal may be a melting pot, but that ideal has not been realized. Some felt that it is not acceptable to use a cookie cutter to make everyone the same. Many do not want to lose what they consider to be their individuality. We sometimes use labels which are easiest to see—like race—because they are visually obvious.

One group made a list of words that describe what is American. That list included mixture, separate group, changing, individualist, prosperous, materialistic, and ambitious. If we are individualists and materialistic and ambitious, have we lost a sense of community? Are we becoming afraid to get involved in our community? These questions raised even more questions from the group: Is it because we are satisfied with what we have? Are we settling for less? Is wealth now the great divider among Americans? The conclusion: The government is not addressing these issues. We should all recognize our ability to make a difference and get involved in doing so.

In their summary of the four conversations, the leaders concluded the following:

> "What did we learn about American pluralism and identity from these four conversations? We learned the importance of being able to have civil discourse with people who are different. That may be the biggest weakness of our society—*that we do not have forums* for people to listen to one another. One participant said, 'We do a lot of shouting and not talking.' We learned that people have reasons for their point of view and when we get at those reasons we are less likely to argue; we begin to see one another as 'whole.' We learned that we can, in fact, talk to one another... We learned to see ourselves through someone else's eyes...
>
> As leaders of these conversations, we concluded that there will always be diversity, even when it is not obvious, that there really are shared American values, and that we can communicate, given the appropriate format. This format is extremely powerful; it brings people together with open minds. With trained moderators it can be done at any time and any place. It makes people feel good to participate, to feel they have really contributed to something, and to build bridges to one another."

Community Conversations in Ohio

Two community conversations have been held in Ohio, one of them, at Jefferson Community College, Steubenville, as part of the Ohio Regional Leadership Conference. The second community conversation was held at Sinclair Community College. Two additional post-publication conversations have been planned.

Steubenville's Conversation

At this host site of the Ohio Regional Leadership Conference, Carl Arlotta, a faculty member from Jefferson Community College, acted as conversation leader along with Mary Navarro, professor of English, Sinclair Community College, Dayton. Approximately eighty-five students and advisors from thirteen Phi Theta Kappa chapters in Ohio, a cross section of the state, took part in the conversation. It had been announced in mailings related to the conference and listed in the conference program. As a conversation starter the leaders referred to the quotation from Henry Cabot Lodge. After introducing participants to the ground rules, they encouraged all to voice their opinions and permit everyone to be heard.

What Was Said?

Although the conversation opened with a criticism of the Lodge quotation as gender biased, the leaders explained the context and moved on. Subsequent issues ranged widely from pride in America, to "dropping the hyphen," to celebrating one's culture and heritage without using them as a weapon. Several participants agreed that the media emphasize differences and focus on the strains among ethnic groups. Others claimed that justice depends on who one is in this country, that ethnic and racial differences are imbedded in all our institutions. While many skirted the issue, an African American described her awareness of racial difference and the treatment she receives on campus. Her statement opened up the discussion and moved it beyond mere platitudes. Also compelling were the comments of an exchange student from Croatia, who confessed that she is dreading the return to her country. She said she feels exceptionally free in America and that Americans should consider themselves lucky. She closed by tearfully telling the other participants that she had not heard from her family in some time and was deeply concerned. Her tears generated sympathetic tears from many of the other participants, along with some hugs and an outpouring of supportive comments.

The conversation concluded with a confession from the Phi Theta Kappa North Central vice president, an Oklahoman. He related an anecdote about how he learned to be proud of being a cowboy. In a composition, he had been required to define himself. In the process of composing the essay, he

came to see that his values and strengths stemmed from that heritage of the West, from riding in the rodeo. Those traits, often negatively stereotyped, are part of what is best about him. Writing the essay changed the way he felt about himself and about others.

According to the leader,

> "The most worthwhile part of the conversation simply was the dialogue itself, although my observation is that many repeated what I consider cliches... Phi Theta Kappans are generally polite and supportive of each other, so there was no real controversy, yet I believe listening to each other in a sustained forum for one-and-a-half hours had real value."

Dayton's Conversation

Thirty-eight people attended this conversation held at Sinclair Community College and led by Mary Navarro and Thomas Martin, professors of English and history at Sinclair Community College. The Sinclair chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, with support from the humanities department, sponsored the session. The chapter also helped advertise and promote the event. Some attendees were students in an honors English class pursuing a writing assignment on "What it means to be an American." Other students came from history and political science classes and from the Phi Theta Kappa chapter. A good mix of whites, African Americans and others made for lively discussion, although at first some whites, appearing uncomfortable, remained silent. As the conversation continued, increasing numbers participated. The conversation was advertised through flyers placed around campus, and through a press release sent to some twenty newspapers and broadcast media in the area. In addition, the two members of the leadership team appeared as guests on a radio talk show, using the opportunity to advertise the event. During the conversation, Dr. Navarro introduced the topic and explained the ground rules and the purpose of the project, while Dr. Martin moderated the conversation, with a student acting as reporter.

What Was Said?

The conversation starter, a quotation from Malcolm X, printed in large type on an overhead-projector transparency, set the desired tone and made for honest discussion. It required both blacks and whites to consider how they look at one another as well as themselves. During the course of the conversation, differences were stressed, but as the time limit approached, a number of speakers tried to bring the group back to a consideration of commonalities.

Everyone agreed that race is an issue that is so deeply woven into American history and culture that it may never be satisfactorily resolved. On the other hand, most appeared to agree that there is much common ground between blacks and whites, and that it is possible for us to discover and build on it. One mixed-race student spoke movingly of the racism within her own family that she has struggled all her life to transcend. Several students, both black and white, appeared angry once or twice, but their strong feelings did not degenerate into confrontation. One of the best things about the conversation was the way in which everyone tacitly agreed that angry words can only exacerbate the race problem, not help it.

Observed the leadership team:

> "What struck us as most worthwhile was the delicate balance we maintained, for over an hour, between anger and excessive politeness: most of the group got quite 'worked up,' which was good, but never to the point of exploding tempers or name-calling. If we conducted another conversation on the same topic, we might choose as a starter an even more inflammatory or controversial quotation. We were concerned that the Malcolm X quotation might be 'too much,' but we were pleasantly surprised."

Community Conversations in Oregon

Three conversations were held in Oregon. The first took place at the Oregon Regional Honors Institute on the campus of Oregon State University, Corvallis. The second conversation took place at Portland Community College in Portland. The final conversation occurred on the campus of Clackamas Community College in Oregon City. The conversations were led by Bernard Knab, director of humanities and visual communications at Chemeketa Community College, who serves as an officer of the Western region of the Community College Humanities Association; and Dave Arter, instructor in the physical science department and teacher of leadership development at Clackamas Community College, representing Phi Theta Kappa. Judy Arter, a senior research associate at the Northwest Regional Educational Research Laboratory, was recorder.

Corvallis's Conversation

Forty-three people, representing thirteen community colleges in Oregon, Southern Idaho, and Utah, met for this first conversation. The group was neither racially nor ethnically diverse, but ranged widely in socio-economic status, age, and family situation. Approximately seventy percent were women. As a conversation starter, the leaders chose a political cartoon depicting the stresses of an American white-collar worker. Participants responded immediately to the cartoon and began to explore the concept of the American Dream. It became apparent quickly that homogeneity in racial and ethnic background does not result in homogeneity of opinion.

What Was Said?

The group rapidly came to see that the American Dream was not the same for everyone in the room. For some it was leisure time to spend with families or on hobbies. For others it was economic freedom, the means to enjoy the luxuries paraded before them through the media, advertising, and friends and neighbors. For still others it was a sense of belonging, of being part of American society and fully able to take advantage of its opportunities. Participants explored their different views on what it should take to achieve the American Dream and the dynamic between economic growth and development, the provision of jobs, and the need to preserve and protect the environment. They examined the tension between the desire for cooperation, a sense of community, and a sense of belonging on one hand, and the freedom to live our own lives and adopt non-traditional lifestyles on the other. They debated how responsibility should be apportioned, asking to what extent each of us is responsible for our situation and to what extent it is imposed on us by the accidents of birth, our race, ethnic origin, the wealth and status of our parents, and by the choices we have made in the past.

Commented the leaders in their post-conversation report:

> "All the participants in this discussion were members of Phi Theta Kappa and, as such, shared a belief in the society's hallmarks: scholarship, leadership, fellowship, and service. Yet the discussion showed that, even so, the group was tremendously diverse. At times it seemed that, as a nation, we are so diverse that we cannot even agree on the basic values upon which to construct an American identity, much less on what that identity should be. We certainly do not, as Americans, have a common goal. Perhaps we are even too diverse to frame the issues in the first place. And yet, while intellectually we diverged, we still seemed to come together in the process of discussing our differences.
>
> In the post-institute evaluations we collected, this conversation was the one most often rated at the top of the list of institute activities. Comments we received reinforced the impression we had at the end of the conversation that discussion, even if not charted and tracked, has inherent value in that it makes us aware of points of view different from our own and, more important, in that it expands our tolerance for those differences."

Portland's Conversation

Thirty-six people from thirteen different cultural organizations affiliated with Portland Community College had been invited to the second conversation, held on the campus of the college. Although more than two dozen had responded affirmatively, only a dozen actually appeared. However, the twelve participants were of amazing diversity: they came from Thailand, the Philippines, Romania, Japan, and various other parts of Europe. In addition, there were two Native Americans and an Amerasian. The conversation opened with the participants introducing themselves and providing brief sketches of their backgrounds. The conversation starter was a portion of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

What Was Said?

The first participant comment raised an issue relative to the nature of the conversation itself: whether the very notion of a public conversation, in which all participants are asked to become fully engaged, was something with which everyone, within the context of such varied cultural backgrounds, felt comfortable. The comment led to individuals elaborating with great insight and candor about the peculiar customs of their cultures with respect to public conversation. The majority of the group who had emigrated to America viewed the frank public discussion in which they were engaged either as an oddity that they had learned to value and participate in, or a phenomenon they had come to realize was American to the core.

The participants talked about what it is like being culturally "different," feeling isolated from the predominant culture, and in some cases being avoided, harassed, or easily targeted for dismissal from work. The group felt strongly that one's own cultural traditions are a haven and must be respected and preserved. Nevertheless, there was a strong feeling against the kind of cultural isolation that splits a community into "them" and "us."

A compelling moment occurred when a participant observed that all seemed to know what their native cultures were, but when he asked for a description of American culture there was a long silence. The leaders asked those who had come to the United States recently to name some of the features of American culture that were especially different from their own. The first word spoken was "freedom," followed by "prosperity," "cleanliness," "space," "wealth," and "consumer goods." A participant mentioned "superiority," and added that he means always striving to be the best, a competitive atmosphere in which, "if you don't keep up, you'll be stepped on."

As the conversation drew to a close with a return to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Dream," participants began to share some of their own concepts about America—tolerance, acceptance, and a celebration of diversity, which, as one young man pointed out, "is one of the things that make America strong."

Oregon City's Conversation

The thirteen participants from the metropolitan Portland area came from organizations such as the Elks Lodge, the local community action agency, Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, the Arts Action Alliance, and the Atkinson Memorial Church. There were also students and faculty from Clackamas Community College. After a pot-luck dinner, participants assembled in a circle of chairs, listened to descriptions of the background and purpose of the conversation, and viewed the cartoon used in the first conversation.

What Was Said?

This time, however, the political cartoon elicited an exploration of the isolation that is becoming increasingly common in America. The group spoke of growing fears for one's safety. A woman from a small community noted that in her community the feeling is different—one feels safe walking out at night and neighbors help one another. She wondered if the isolation we seem to feel comes from the increasing concentration of population in cities and the loss of rural America. Another participant suggested that it is American competitiveness and the desire for material goods and instant gratification that are at fault. The group observed that when disaster struck Oregon, as it did during the recent floods, an instant sense of community emerged.

In discussing the notion of the melting pot, the group saw it as an increasingly quaint and inaccurate metaphor for America. One woman said that a tapestry of rich and varied designs and colors might more aptly describe who or what we have become as a nation.

According to the conversation leaders,

> "If we had to state a conclusion that these conversations led us to, it would be this: that our inability to describe traditionally a cultural identity that is uniquely American is, far from being a weakness of American society, one of our country's greatest strengths, for it forces us, more than any other nation, to define our culture by those things that make us human. In the global culture that must inevitably evolve if we are to survive and prosper, America's pluralistic and humanistic cultural identity will almost certainly be looked back upon as the first promising glimmer of that global evolution."

Community Conversations in North and South Carolina

Three conversations were conducted in North and South Carolina—the first in Fayetteville, North Carolina, at the Carolinas Leadership Conference; the second and third at Trident Technical College in Charleston, South Carolina. The conversations were organized and led by Joanie Keller, Carolinas Regional Coordinator for Phi Theta Kappa from Trident Technical College and Dixon Durham professor of history and CCHA member, from Midlands Technical College, SC.

Fayetteville's Conversation

Thirty-two Phi Theta Kappa advisors and chapter members attended this conversation, which began with participants introducing themselves and providing information about their heritage, religious affiliations, and anything else they thought relevant. The leader used the Declaration of Independence as the first conversation starter. It was followed by a quotation from Henry Cabot Lodge. Participants also discussed works of DuBois and Booker T. Washington as well as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple.*

What Was Said?

The conversation began with attendees offering various definitions of Americanism, ranging from "Mom, baseball, and apple pie" to those of Native Americans and South and Central Americans. Central to the conversation was "The freedom to worship or not to worship as one pleases." The notion was raised that Americans are viewed as arrogant by those outside our borders. This same arrogance was defined as national pride and patriotism by the participants.

In reference to the Declaration, our forefathers spoke of a Creator, but what does that mean to someone who doesn't prescribe to Judeo-Christian beliefs? As they examined the concept of "unalienable rights," the group determined that although the document was drafted by white male property owners, and those rights were granted only to that class, as one participant put it, "We have moved from a maleness to a humanness" society. We have also moved the emphasis from "right of property" to "right of opportunity."

Turning to the idea of justice, the group examined some current issues facing the judicial and corrections systems. "Is it better to educate, to incarcerate, or rehabilitate?" brought lively and emotional responses, as did questions pertaining to variations of laws from state to state.

Participants then responded to the Henry Cabot Lodge passage and to issues of immigration. They compared differences among various cultures, religions, and racial identities. One participant observed, "If we are proud of ourselves as a nation, race, or class, we shouldn't have to say it."

A discussion of DuBois and Booker T. Washington led to an examination of slavery. The group was moved by those among them who spoke of ancestors who had been either slaves or slave owners during the Civil War. It was clear that the notion of slavery was intolerable to all. When references were made to Bosnia, Russia, and the race-consciousness of Japan, one participant warned that America, suffering from tunnel vision, runs the risk of becoming Balkanized. In continuing the discussion of race, the group agreed that race relations are more volatile now than they were twenty to thirty years ago.

Charleston's First Conversation

Invitations were sent to thirty-six African American and Philippine community leaders, and although several responded, only two attended. The conversation, which took place at Trident Technical College, had eighteen participants, predominantly faculty, staff, and a few students. As in the previous conversation, participants introduced themselves, talked about their backgrounds, and examined the passage from the Declaration of Independence. Over the course of the conversation, they spoke of American attitudes toward politics, the responsibility to vote, and immigration issues.

What Was Said?

The group began by questioning what was meant by "unalienable rights" during colonial times, and noted how exclusionary is the phrase "all men." Participants explored American cynicism about politicians and pondered whether the government is guilty of failing Americans. When the conversation turned to voting, participants agreed that parents should teach their children to vote by taking them into the voting booth as youngsters.

The discussion concluded with comments centering on immigration and learning English as a common language. The feeling of many was that immigrants who do not attempt to change their way of life or language make it harder for themselves to become Americans, because they remain in the "old country." They also make it difficult for their children, who enter public schools with a limited knowledge of English. The group generally agreed that a bilingual education, while helpful, is not the answer. Many felt that English should be the required language of all school children to help them become a part of society and compete for jobs, scholarships and other opportunities.

Charleston's Second Conversation

The last of the conversations, also held at Trident Technical College, consisted of twenty-one participants. Again, although the same mailing list was sent, only two community members attended. The group consisted predominantly of students, with a few faculty and staff members. The conversation leader began by introducing a poem by Diane Burns entitled "Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question," which introduced the issue of stereotyping. Other conversation starters introduced at various points in the conversation were passages by Harry Kitano, Charles Kuralt, and Simone Weil.

What Was Said?

The group explored the problem of stereotyping, noting that it encourages seeing others as categories rather than as individuals. They observed that stereotyping can begin with an innocent curiosity and an innocent question regarding someone's heritage, which is then taken as an offense—people can sometimes be overly sensitive because of past negative experiences that have caused defenses to build up over time. When asked "What can we do about stereotyping? How can we battle against it?" the group offered the following suggestions: "Instead of being defensive and too quick to assume, we need better communication"; people need to work together from both sides to battle stereotyping because it is a direct result of ignorance, insecurity, and a need to feel powerful. Participants agreed that each individual has a responsibility to speak out against stereotyping because some people do not always "engage their brain" before they speak.

Participants examined the issue of American individualism, with one member of the group asserting that never has there been any tolerance towards individualism in America, dating back to the creation of this country. Another person disagreed, arguing that "those same creators gave us the right to be at this conference and be able to voice our opinions about this issue."

The conversation concluded with a discussion of the notion of a global village. A participant commented that the world can be enriched by various cultures and areas, that there is not a barrier keeping us from benefitting from the values of other cultures.

In evaluating all three conversations, one leader had this to say:

> "Every conversation had wonderful participation—in fact, we experienced difficulty completing all the topics ... At times, the discussions were heated, but never hostile. All in all, it was a wonderful opportunity to gain new perspectives on American pluralism. The most gratifying memory of these evenings was the fact that the participants not only shared their viewpoints and experiences, they also truly listened when others were sharing their viewpoints. This made it a wonderful learning experience for us all."

Community Conversations in Texas

Five community conversations were held in Texas. The first conversation was offered as a workshop at the Texas-New Mexico Regional Phi Theta Kappa Leadership Conference at the University of Texas in Tyler; the second, in Snyder, was held in the Fine Arts Theater on the campus of Western Texas College; the third, also in Snyder, was held at the senior citizens center. All three conversations were led by Carol Nicklaus, assistant professor of humanities and philosophy and coordinator of the honors program at Amarillo College; and Mary Hood, professor of psychology and director of counseling and testing at Western Texas College, Snyder, and the college Phi Theta Kappa advisor. The fourth and fifth conversations took place in Dallas and were led by a two-member team from Richland College, the largest college in the seven-member Dallas County community college district. Larry Polk, professor of human development, serves as campus advisor of Phi Theta Kappa; Luke Barber is a professor of philosophy and humanities and CCHA member.

Tyler's Conversation

Fifteen students and advisors from Phi Theta Kappa chapters across Texas and New Mexico participated in this conversation. They were a diverse group: one student was born in Canada and another in Iran. The workshop, open to all conferees, was well publicized, since it had been listed in the program. The conversation leader explained the purposes and ground rules of the conversation and opened with "Miss Hicks" by William Saroyan. The group focused on the "privileges" of being an American and the responsibilities which accompany those privileges.

What Was Said?

Participants talked most about the differences between rights and privileges in America and the many responsibilities we have to live up to. They agreed that being an American brings with it both rights and privileges. They did not agree on how superior we feel or behave as a result of those rights and privileges.

Snyder's First Conversation

At this conversation held on the West Texas College campus, twenty students, four faculty members, and one administrator were in attendance. Traditional and non-traditional students, blacks, Caucasians, Hispanics, and international students were all represented. As publicity for the conversation, articles appeared in the *Snyder Daily News* and the *Western Texan*. A brief article ran in "Tracks Around Campus" and signs were posted on

campus. The conversation leader opened with both the Declaration of Independence and the Oath of Naturalized Citizens. The group focused on the question "What do we share as Americans?"

What Was Said?

Participants focused on basic rights and agreed on the importance of those rights. The welfare system caused the most disagreement. The mention of a recent beating of illegal immigrants caused heated discussion. Overall, participants stressed commonalities over differences.

Snyder's Second Conversation

Fourteen people, including one college administrator, attended this conversation at a senior citizens center. The center had been visited during lunch hour at which time personal invitations were extended. The conversation began with the question "Don't we all know what it means to be an American?" This one question got the conversation started, and nothing else was needed.

What Was Said?

This group discussed at length the lack of leadership in America. According to one participant, "Our lives have not changed much since Mr. Clinton became president and it will not be much different when the next president is elected." The notion that those with money are the ones who have the power sparked a great deal of disagreement. Hotly debated was the issue of money and power versus public control, or control of the many. It led to a discussion of what it means to be free.

One point on which everyone agreed is the importance of education; a participant added that those with economic advantages do better in school. The group considered whether we know more facts but we've lost problem-solving abilities.

The group returned to a consideration of whether the oath taken by naturalized citizens should be taken by everyone. It was agreed that a big crisis, such as World War II, tends to bring us together. In general, though, the group emphasized differences rather than commonalities and agreed that we have moved from being a "we" nation to a "me" nation—that we all need to be involved in the political process with common goals rather than fragmented ones, and we all need to care about one another.

Dallas's Conversation

For the first conversation at Richland College , the leadership team invited as many immigrants as possible, believing that their perspective on American pluralism and identity would enrich the conversation. In response to an invitation to community members, faculty, and students, approximately sixty people met for an informal lunch before beginning the conversation. After establishing the ground rules, the leaders introduced several poems, including Diane Burns's "Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question" and others by Pat Mora. The Mora poem "Immigrants" became the focus of much of the conversation. Because so many of the participants were immigrants, much of the discussion focused on the question of what it means to be an American and why people would want to leave their home countries to come to the United States.

What Was Said?

Many participants told moving stories about their own experiences of trying to become Americans. They talked about the difficulty of seeing oneself as a "real" American, when the term "American" seems to suggest membership in the dominant culture. They felt that being a "real" American involved becoming a member of white culture, which is impossible for many, if not most of today's immigrants, so many of whom are non-white.

Several participants who are American citizens but members of minority populations said that they did not consider themselves Americans, nor did they think they ever would. A young woman of about twenty, whose parents had emigrated from Mexico when she was three, said that she still considers herself to be a Mexican, although she has spent most of her life in the U.S. She speaks no Spanish and has never lived in Mexico; nevertheless, she is often asked by members of the dominant culture, "Where are you from?"

Dallas's *On-Line* Conversation

An electronic, asynchronous, on-line community conversation took place after invitations were extended to approximately 1000 people. Before the electronic conversation concluded, approximately 250 people had participated, including faculty, staff, students, and members of the community. More than 600 separate messages were posted to the group. After individuals expressed interest in participating in the discussion, the leaders established an on-line mailing list called "American", which was used exclusively for one month. After they established the list, the leaders mailed an initial message establishing ground rules and procedures. Added to this message was the following: "Practice deep listening (reading), reflecting, and also sensitive, caring speech (writing). Refrain from being

judgmental about mistakes in spelling, punctuation, etc. Our aim is to converse, not publish." The conversation starter was Theodore White's metaphor of America as an idea.

What Was Said?

Participants posted thoughtful responses which spoke of our "unity of purpose," "core of shared values," "a beautiful mosaic work of art held together," and "a unifying core." At the same time, there were references to "diversity," "individualism" "freedom to differ," and "freedom to be unique." From the beginning, both the difficulties and the benefits of merging pluralism and identity emerged. Often participants began messages with "After thinking about your comments overnight..."

The conversation leaders believe that participants who might be uncomfortable speaking in a large group were willing to communicate from the safety of their private office, home, or computer lab, although they were actually "speaking" to an audience of hundreds of people. Evaluations of the conversation were overwhelmingly positive, and many requests were made to continue the conversation in the future.

In thinking back on both Richland College conferences, the leadership team had this to say:

> "We learned that people very much want and need the opportunity to talk about these issues. We also learned that participants saw conversation as the best way to learn about our differences and penetrate them to find out what we share as Americans and as human beings. We found that the humanities offer powerful and diverse voices which call us to a deeper understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a people ... The strength of these conversations is in the fact that they give rise to greater knowledge, understanding, and compassion. The weakness is that they are, in themselves, just the first step in bringing about change. We must all become engaged in creating an America that supports our freedom, diversity, and individuality even as it nurtures our need for belonging, connection, and community."

Community Conversations in Washington State

Three community conversations were held in Washington State. All three took place at Centralia College, Centralia, and were led by Don Foren, English and philosophy instructor and Phi Theta Kappa advisor at Centralia College; and Jeff Clausen, philosophy instructor at Green River Community College, who was the humanities scholar and CCHA representative. The three wildly divergent sessions focused on the American Dream; conversation starters consisted of a collection of quotations from *Guidelines for Conversations.*

Centralia's Conversation

The first conversation was part of the Northwest Regional Honors Institute held at Centralia College. Forty-six students and advisors attended. The conversation received coverage in the regional newsletter and in many college publications. Bad weather resulted in a small showing for the second conversation. Nevertheless, the group was remarkably diverse: three students, three faculty, two members of the community (one British woman, one gay male professional). Conversation starters were quotations from Joan Didion and Alice Walker. A front-page article and a Letter to the Editor in the local newspaper resulted in a considerably better showing for the third conversation. Thirty-six people attended, including fifteen students, three faculty, and seventeen people from the community.

What Was Said?

Session one's participants explored the idealism of our founders; the students present appeared to value many of the same American virtues: equality, freedom, law, and dissent. Much of the discussion revolved around how these ideas often bump into one another. Participants agreed that the relative generosity of Americans is a redeeming quality, even when specific horrors seem to reveal duplicity in our uses of power and privilege.

The diversity of the second conversation's group was a distinct advantage. After wrestling with the American Dream turned nightmare as inspired by the Joan Didion quotation, the group focused on Alice Walker's notion of human solidarity and spoke of the need for more, and diverse, voices in our conversations about American identity. The British woman, who has been in the U.S. five years, and the gay man, who works as a consultant on diversity issues, raised important questions about stereotyping and xenophobia among Americans.

Session three, marked by considerably more community involvement, generated particularly interesting contributions by a Russian woman and a Hispanic student. An older male began by mentioning a breakdown in

values: police action, especially the use of excessive force, is often cited; our lives are more tied up in regulation; we're in trouble. A retired historian responded, "We've always been in trouble, but we're still admired by most other countries and communities." Others felt there is indeed a lack of respect for the authority of teachers and elders. Some blamed this lack of respect on the fact that television glorifies violence.

A participant noted, "I can't remember any time growing up that I didn't have meals with my parents." A teenager responded that his family rarely met for meals, but they loved and valued one another and their choices. "Having the right to choose to do what we want and what we choose is what is great about America." Most of the group agreed. In Japan, if a nail stands up, it gets hammered down, said one woman. "Gender roles are a way of getting hammered down here," said a student. She said her grandmother used to be quiet and conforming, but now has a role at home and career, and is more active in the community. One or two participants objected to the changes in women's roles, but most saw the changes as positive. One man continually reminded the group that non-violent direct action can help ordinary people gain control of the government and other bureaucracies that are out of control.

The issues of comparative religious values caused a few sparks to fly, but by the end of the conversation, there was considerable consensus that we are torn between the demands of liberty and the need for security.

According to the conversation leaders,

> "The three-part conversation ended with people hoping to be better informed and more involved in the issues of our times. They left feeling part of a community of diverse but well-meaning people who, through discussion, can grapple with important ideas."

PART III

FROM *GUIDELINES FOR CONVERSATION LEADERS*

Guidelines for Conversation Leaders was developed as a resource for the Community Conversations Project. It provided conversation leaders from Phi Theta Kappa and CCHA with step-by-step suggestions on how to plan and organize their conversations. The excerpts in this section are offered to assist other community college faculty members interested in convening similar conversation programs for their students and community members.

A. Conducting Your Community Conversations
B. Selected Conversation Starters
C. Publicizing Your Community Conversations

A. Conducting Your Community Conversations

This section provides a step-by-step approach to planning and leading community conversations on the meaning of American identity.

Included are:

1. Sample Agenda

Here is an overview of the logistical arrangements that must take place prior to the conversation, as well as a step-by-step suggested rundown for an actual conversation.

2. Challenges You May Face

What will you do during your conversation if someone monopolizes the discussion? What will happen if conflict arises between two group members? This section provides suggestions on how to deal with challenging situations that may come up during your discussions.

3. Ground Rules for Discussion

The Ground Rules presented in this section will help keep your conversation on course and may prevent challenging situations from arising. Write these rules on a blackboard or flip chart at the front of the room so that all participants can see them clearly throughout the conversation. You may also choose to duplicate the page of Ground Rules and distribute a copy to each participant. Before beginning your conversation, review the Ground Rules one by one. Ask those present if they are comfortable with the Ground Rules. Are there additional rules they would like to add? Any they would like to change? If participants have a say in formulating the rules, they are more likely to follow them and step in to help if a problem arises.

1. Sample Agenda

Community conversations should be scheduled for approximately two-and-one-half-hour periods to provide sufficient time for your participants to become comfortable and for serious discussion to take place. Make sure you pay attention to the physical and psychological environment in which each conversation occurs. You are encouraged to have refreshments available. You will also want to make nametags and pens available. Chairs should be arranged in a double-row semi-circle for conversations of up to fifty participants. In advance of your conversation, select someone to be the conversation reporter; this person will be responsible for recording

areas on which there is common ground and areas on which there is some disagreement during the conversation. Select a person who is a skilled note-taker and recorder. You will also want to select someone from either your college or a cosponsoring organization with experience in conflict resolution to step in and mediate disputes should that become necessary.

Role of the Conversation Leader

- Welcome those present; introduce college president or other senior administrator to make opening remarks.
- Introduce co-sponsoring organizations and conversation leaders. (Ask a member of your college's humanities faculty to join you as conversation leader.)
- Ask each person to introduce him or herself. (While fifty participants is a substantial number, this activity can be handled expeditiously; it is important for everyone to know who is in the room.)
- Make an opening statement about the importance of having many voices heard, and the hope of arriving at some common understandings—with emphasis on the fact that agreement is not essential; what is important is the process of talking together.
- Present Ground Rules; gain group agreement to the Rules.
- Announce and explain the role of the conversation reporter.
- Distribute a copy of the selected Conversation Starters to each person; briefly (5-10 minutes) set the Conversation Starters in a historical, literary, or cultural context, and then begin the conversation by asking "What does it mean to you to be an American?" Additional questions to be integrated into the conversation are:

  Are there distinctive qualities of our community that contribute to our identity as Americans?

  How do my own life story and the history of my community contribute to my conceptions of American identity?

  How have American history, literature, and culture contributed to our understanding of ourselves and our communities?

- Conversation leaders guide the conversation.
- At the conclusion of the allotted time, conversation leaders refocus participants on the Ground Rules to assess their progress—announce the date, time, and location of the next conversation.
- Reporter provides a summary of the variety of views that were expressed, and highlights areas in which there seemed to be agreement.

Sample Agenda

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
ON
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AMERICAN

Community College of Our Town
Learning Resources Center
Room 111
June 1, 1997
1:00pm - 3:30pm

1:00pm	**Registration and Refreshments**
1:15pm	**Welcome; Opening Remarks** • Community college president (or other senior administrator) • Representatives of co-sponsoring organizations
1:30pm	**Introductions** • Introduction of conversation leaders • Introduction of conversation reporter • Participants introduce themselves
1:40pm	**Ground Rules**
1:45pm - 3:00pm	**Community Conversation**
3:00pm	**Concluding Activities** • "This Is What I Heard"—Reporter's summary • Ground Rules are revisited • Where do we go from here?—Announce next conversation
3:30pm	**Adjournment**

2. Challenges You May Face

As a conversation leader, you will be faced with the task of inviting people from different backgrounds to share their views with a group of fellow community members. This can be intimidating to people, especially if they feel that they were invited to attend the conversation because of their race, ethnic origin, religion, or cultural heritage. It is important to emphasize that all present should feel free to express their opinions without being judged by group members, and to respond to the views of others in attendance. You may want to emphasize that having people from different backgrounds will serve to make the discussion more valuable, but that during the conversation, participants speak only for themselves and not as representatives of various ethnic groups.

If a select few seem to be monopolizing the conversation, try to get other participants involved. You might say:

- That's a good point—let's let someone else respond to it.
- Let's get back to that first point you made. Would anyone else like to respond to that? (Repeat the point.)
- So far, we've heard views from one perspective. Who would like to express another opinion?

Sometimes, discussion groups can get sidetracked and become heavily involved in closely related topics. If this goes on for too long, you might try to get the discussion back on track by making comments such as, "I wonder how this relates to our major concern?" or "That's interesting, but I think we need to get back to our main focus."

You may be called upon to moderate a dispute between group members. If an incident occurs in which some participants become hostile to others, ask other group members for recommendations on how to handle the situation. Arrange ahead of time to have an individual experienced in conflict resolution present; he or she should be prepared to mediate conflicts which may arise. Your college may have staff who are trained to do this—if not, check with your cosponsoring organizations.

Some people may speak in a more intense manner than others. If you are not sure whether someone has become hostile, ask participants if they are comfortable with the level of conflict or if the Ground Rules should be invoked.

You may also want to remind participants that your goal as a group is not to achieve a common opinion, but to express and hear a variety of views so that all participants can learn.

(Excerpted from A Handbook of Tips, *NEH National Conversation Kit)*

3. Ground Rules for Conversations

Conversation participants will:

- Direct comments to the group as a whole, rather than to the discussion leader.
- Be brief. No one will monopolize the conversation. All who wish to speak must have a chance to express their views.
- Not allow disagreements to become personal; name-calling and shouting are not acceptable.
- Show respect for the views expressed by others. Although a frank exchange of conflicting views can be valuable, our dialogue will be conducted within the boundaries of a civil conversation.
- Understand that others have reasons for their opinions, and that their reasons are interesting, not dumb, unreasonable, or immoral.
- Consider the underlying values of everyone's opinions—their reasons for feeling as they do.
- Leave the conversation thinking about the opinions of others and how these may contribute to a common understanding of what it means to be an American.

B. Selected Conversation Starters

Community Conversations begin with Conversation Starters...excerpts from American literary, historical, and cultural works which embody major ideas—historical and contemporary—which are key to our understanding of ourselves as Americans.

Conversation leaders may choose their Conversation Starters from those on the following pages (which may be duplicated), or from other historical or cultural works which they believe will be appropriate for their participants.

Conversation Starters can be poems, quotations, paintings, videos, films, excerpts from the U.S. Founding Documents, or other selections from American culture.

Conversation starters should be accessible—easily seen or heard—to all participants.

Conversation Starters

"Democratic nations care but little for what has been, but they are haunted by visions of what will be; in this direction their unbounded imagination grows and dilates beyond all measure...Democracy, which shuts the past against the poet, opens the future before him."

Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy In America*

"I am the American heartbreak—
the rock on which Freedom
Stumped its toe."

Langston Hughes, *American Heartbreak*, 1951

"Let every man honor and love the land of his birth and the race from which he springs and keep their memory green. It is a pious and honorable duty. But let us have done with British-Americans and Irish-Americans and German-Americans, and so on, and all be Americans...If a man is going to be an American at all, let him be so without any qualifying adjectives; and if he is going to be something else, let him drop the word American from his personal description."

**Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Day We Celebrate*,
Address to the New England Society of Brooklyn,
December 21, 1888**

"That man...says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place, and ain't I a woman? I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear the lash as well—and ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard, and ain't I a woman?"

**Sojourner Truth (Isabella Van Wagener)
Speech at Woman's Rights Convention,
Akron, OH, 1851**

"Wherever I have knocked, a door has opened. Wherever I have wandered, a path has appeared. I have been helped, supported, encouraged, and nurtured by people of all races, creeds, colors, and dreams."

**Alice Walker
In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, 1983**

"America, America, God shed His grace on thee: it is the idea which has informed all our history, the idea which sent and still sends us West, the failing dream which drives us into easy violence and neurotic resignation and off the Golden Gate Bridge: the remembered dream which haunts our uneasy wakening. No people ever expected so much of a country; none ever risked such failure."

Joan Didion, review of *America, America* by Elia Kazan, in *Vogue*, 1964

"Riding by taxi, Brooklyn to Queens,
a grey spring day. The Hispanic driver,
when I ask 'es usted Mexicano?' tells me
No, he's an exile from Uruguay. And I say,
'The only other Uruguayan I've met
was a writer—maybe you know his name?
Mario Benedetti?
And he takes both hands
off the wheel and swings round,
glittering with joy: 'Benedetti!
Mario Benedetti!'
There are
hallelujahs in his voice—
we execute a perfect
figure 8 on the shining highway,
and rise aloft, high above traffic, flying
all the rest of the way in the blue sky, azul, azul!"

Denise Levertov

"I have a dream that one day men will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers. I still have a dream this morning that one day every Negro in this country, every colored person in the world, will be judged on the basis of the content of his character rather than the color of his skin, and every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality."

Martin Luther King, Jr,
A Christmas Sermon on Peace

"The problem with the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relations of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the island of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict."

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

C. Publicizing Your Community Conversations

There are many ways to publicize your conversations within your college and to your community and local media. This section includes a sample list of individuals and groups to invite to your conversations, as well as a sample promotional flyer, a sample news release, and sample public service announcements (PSAs) for print and broadcast media.

In addition, conversation leaders can contact community groups to co-sponsor the conversations. Ask them to send special invitations/mailings to their constituencies and place notices in their newsletters, as well as at strategic community locations such as public libraries, shopping malls, and community bulletin boards.

This section consists of the following components:

1. Who Should Be Invited to Participate?

This list of college, community service, civic, educational, and religious organizations will help you decide which groups in your community to invite to the conversation.

2. Sample Invitation Letter

In addition to placing notices at your college, in the community, and in the local media, send out invitations at least two weeks in advance to avoid scheduling conflicts.

3. Sample Promotional Flyer

Flyers should be placed on bulletin boards at your college and in libraries, churches, synagogues, malls, and other community locations.

4. Sample News Release

Send this news release to newspapers, television, and radio stations in your community to stimulate broad participation in the conversations.

5. Sample Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Tailor these sample 10-, 20-, and 30-second PSAs to the needs of your local broadcast media.

1. Who Should Be Invited to Participate?

Community Conversations are an opportunity for Americans from different backgrounds to speak face-to-face and learn from each other. Therefore, it is important that you engage a spectrum of diverse groups from your college and community as both co-sponsoring partners and as conversation participants.

Consider such groups as:

- churches and synagogues, representing your community's diverse populations
- student organizations representing a range of cultures, races, and ethnicities
- service, civic, and recreational community organizations representing the range of cultures, races, and ethnicities
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- American Indian Movement (AIM)
- La Raza
- Urban League
- Parent-Teacher Associations
- Heritage Associations
- Community Centers
- YWCAs, YMCAs
- Other organizations that you know are important sectors of your community

2. Sample Invitation Letter

(In addition to placing notices at your college and in your local media, a letter of invitation should be sent to members of the diverse groups you are engaging in this conversation.)

(re-process and reproduce on your college's letterhead)

Dear Colleague,

What does it mean to be an American? Are there distinctive qualities of our community which contribute to our identity as Americans? How do your own life story and the history of this community contribute to your conception of American identity? These questions will be the focus of a community conversation at [name of college] on [date] at [time] in [building, room number]. Joining our college as co-sponsors of this conversation are [names of cosponsoring organizations].

This conversation is part of a National Conversation on the same topic taking place all across our country with leadership from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is intended to give community members the opportunity to share their views on American identity and explore ideas, attitudes, and values we may have in common as Americans. Sparked by excerpts from the U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence, other historical documents, and American literature, the conversation will explore how America's cultural works contribute to our understanding of ourselves as Americans.

We believe you have much to contribute to a conversation of this nature, and hope you are interested in participating. Please call [phone number] to confirm your participation by [date]. We look forward to seeing you and hearing your views.

Sincerely,

[Conversation Leader]
[Title]
[College]

cc: [community college president]

3. Sample Promotional Flyer

COME SHARE YOUR VIEWS!

community members, students, faculty

A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
on
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN?

How does your own life story contribute to your conceptions of American identity?

Are there qualities of our community which contribute to our identity as Americans?

How have American history, literature, and culture contributed to our understanding of ourselves and our community?

SPONSORED BY

Community College of Our Town
Southeast Asian Students Union
Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Urban League
American Association of University Women
Jewish Community Center
First Institutional Baptist Church
United Methodists Church
Catholic Diocese

DATE:	June 1, 1997
PLACE:	Community College of Our Town
ROOM:	Room 111
TIME:	1:00pm - 3:30pm

To reserve your place call [insert name] **at** [phone number].

4. Sample News Release

(re-process and reproduce on your college's letterhead)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Contact:** **[Insert your name]**
[phone number]

[name of college] TO HOLD COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON AMERICAN IDENTITY

[City]—What does it mean to be an American? Are there distinctive qualities of our community which contribute to our identity as Americans? How do our own life stories and the history of our community contribute to our conceptions of American identity? These questions and others will be the focus of a community conversation at **[name of college]** on **[date]** at **[time]** in **[building, room number]**.

This conversation is part of a National Conversation on the same topic taking place all across our country. It is intended to give community members the opportunity to share their views on American identity and explore ideas, attitudes, and values we may have in common as Americans. Sparked by excerpts from the U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence, other historical documents, and American literature, the conversation will explore how America's cultural works contribute to our understanding of ourselves as Americans.

Joining **[name of college]** as co-sponsors of this conversation are **[names of co-sponsoring organizations]**.

"We at **[name of college]** are very pleased to be providing this opportunity for our students and the members of our community to come together to talk about the challenging issues that surround today's concepts of American identity," said **[name of college president]**, president, **[name of college]**.

"We have carefully selected works from American culture that embody major ideas—historical and contemporary—to serve as Conversation Starters because they are key to our understanding of ourselves as Americans," added **[insert your name], [title], [name of college]**. "Our hope is that community members will come to better understand each other as they listen to each other and discover what they share."

Please call **[phone number]** to become involved.

5. Sample Public Service Announcements

Television and radio stations provide free air time to community groups in the form of public service announcements (PSAs). In order to publicize your conversations on the air, call each station's public service director for information on how and when to submit a PSA. Public service announcements should be received by the station at least two weeks before you want them to be aired. Be sure to include your name, address, and daytime phone number.

You will find sample 10-, 20-, and 30-second PSAs below. Generally, 10-second PSAs have about 30 words, 20-second PSAs have about 50 words, and 30-second PSAs have about 70 words. You can submit all three versions. However, before submitting your PSAs in writing, read them out loud and time them to be sure you have kept each version within the given time frame.

10-SECOND PSA

> What does it mean to be an American? Are there qualities of our community which contribute to our identity as Americans? Call **[phone number]** to join a community conversation on American identity sponsored by **[college]**.

20-SECOND PSA

> What does it mean to be an American? Are there qualities of our community that contribute to our identity as Americans? How do our own life stories and the history of our community contribute to our conceptions of American identity? Join a community conversation on American identity at **[college]** on **[date]** at **[time]**.

30-SECOND PSA

> What does it mean to be an American? Are there distinctive qualities of our community that contribute to our identity as Americans? How do our own life stories and the history of our community contribute to our conceptions of American identity? To discuss these questions and others like them at a community conversation on American identity sponsored by **[college]** on **[date]** at **[time]**, call **[phone number]**.

PART IV

- Community Conversation Leaders
- About Phi Theta Kappa
- About the Community College Humanities Association

APPENDICES

Community Conversation Leaders

California
Don Larson, Fresno City College, Fresno
Judy Ryan, Fresno City College, Fresno

Colorado
Nancy McCollum, Pikes Peak Community College, Pikes Peak
Richard C. Trussell, Pikes Peak Community College, Pikes Peak

Florida
Ira Holmes, Central Florida Community College, Ocala
Tom Weaver, Central Florida Community College, Ocala

Indiana
Eugene Spiess, Ivy Tech State College, Indianapolis
Christopher Wood, Ivy Tech State College, Indianapolis

Kentucky
Wes Lites, Jefferson Community College, Louisville
Cliff E. Niemeier, Sr., Jefferson Community College, Louisville

Louisiana
Max Reichard, Delgado Community College, New Orleans

Michigan
Richard Bailey, Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn
Gail Knapp, Mott Community College, Flint

Minnesota
Anne S. Levig, Cambridge Community College, Brooklyn Park
Barbara Mantini, Cambridge Community College, Brooklyn Park

Mississippi
Norma Hammill, Pearl River Community College, Poplarville

Missouri
John Bayer, St. Louis Community College, St. Louis
Richard Kalfus, St. Louis Community College, St. Louis

Nebraska
Tim Duggan, Metropolitan Community College, Fort Omaha
Connie Renard-Chandler, Metropolitan Community College, Fort Omaha

New York

Rosalie Higgins, State University of New York, Delhi
Ann Sova, Broome Community College, Binghampton

Ohio

Carl Arlotta, Sinclair Community College, Dayton
Mary Navarro, Sinclair Community College, Dayton

Oregon

David Arter, Clackamas Community College, Oregon City
Bernard Knab, Chemeketa Community College, Salem

South Carolina

Dick Durham, Midlands Community College, Columbia
Joan Keller, Trident Technical College, Charleston

Texas

Luke Barber, Richland College, Dallas
Mary Hood, Western Texas College, Snyder
Carol Nicklaus, Amarillo College, Amarillo
Larry Polk, Richland College, Dallas

Virginia

William Paquette, Tidewater Community College, Portsmouth
H. Brady Surles, Southwest Virginia Community College, Richlands

Washington

Jeffrey Clausen, Green River Community College, Auburn
Don Foren, Centralia College, Centralia

About Phi Theta Kappa

Established by Missouri college presidents in 1918, Phi Theta Kappa is recognized as the largest honor society in higher education with more than one million members and 1,200 chapters located in all fifty states, Canada and Germany. Phi Theta Kappa recognizes academic achievement of two-year college students and provides opportunity for growth and development through honors, leadership and service programming. In 1994, Phi Theta Kappa - Community College Humanities Association's, NEH-funded project *Community Conversations*, was added to its extensive array of programming.

Annually, more than 70,000 students, with cumulative grade-point averages of 3.5 or higher, completing a minimum of twelve hours of associate degree course work, are inducted into Phi Theta Kappa. Students must maintain high academic standing for the duration of enrollment at the two-year college. More than 150,000 members actively participate in Society programming each year. The average age of a new member is thirty, ranging from eighteen to eighty. Nearly 375 senior institutions provide in excess of $26 million in scholarships to members. Distinguished alumni include Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Ambassador: Fred Haise, Apollo XIII Astronaut; Sela Ward, actress; and H. Ross Perot, businessman.

Headquartered in Mississippi since 1935, Phi Theta Kappa has a permanent staff of forty-five. In 1997, Phi Theta Kappa will take occupancy of its new headquarters facility, The Center for Excellence, located on the grounds of Mississippi's Education and Research Center in Jackson. Future plans for the facility include state-of-the-art interactive technology, enabling nationwide delivery of Society programming.

About the Community College Humanities Association

The Community College Humanities Association (CCHA) is a national, nonprofit association devoted to strengthening the humanities in the nation's two-year colleges. The only national organization of its kind for humanities faculty in two year colleges, CCHA also serves as a Council of the American Association of Community Colleges, and is an affiliate of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, and the American Historical Association (AHA). CCHA has the following purposes:

- to advance the cause of the humanities through its own activities and in cooperation with other institutions and groups involved in higher education;
- to provide a regular forum for the exchange of ideas on significant issues in the humanities and in higher education;
- to encourage and support the professional work of faculty in the humanities;
- to sponsor conferences and institutes which provide opportunities for faculty development and enrichment;
- to promote the discussion of issues of concern to faculty and administrators in the humanities;
- to disseminate information through the publications of the Association.

CCHA is organized into five regional divisions and acts as host to five regional conferences which alternate yearly with national conferences. In addition, it administers a national awards program, a literary magazine competition, a mini-grant program, and special initiatives in the humanities. CCHA publishes a tri-annual newsletter, *The Community College Humanist*, and an annual scholarly journal, *Community College Humanities Review*.

Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society
460 Briarwood Drive, Suite 415
Jackson, MS 39236-3729

Community College Humanities Association
c/o Essex County College
303 University Avenue
Newark, NJ 07102

BEST COPY AVAILABLE